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SUBJECT: INFORMATION MINISTER SUBMITS PLAN FOR MINISTRY
"RESTRUCTURING" TO COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Ref: A. Kuwait 3057

Ref: B. Kuwait 1493

1. Summary: Dr. Anas Al-Reshaid, Kuwaiti Minister of Information, unveiled his formal Ministry restructuring plan at the regular August 14 meeting of the Council of Ministers. While the Minister told reporters, "I will be the last Information Minister," the practical effects of the proposed plan, which largely entails transforming ministry sectors into semi-autonomous "authorities" still subject to ministerial supervision, remain unclear. Nevertheless, columnists hailed the Minister's vision, and the Council referred the report to its legal committee, which is charged with drafting legislation implementing the plan to be submitted to Parliament. End Summary.

A Profusion of "Authorities"

2. In Al-Reshaid's proposal, the state-owned radio, television and print organs would all be spun off into "independent authorities." The radio and television arms, along with the engineering department, would become the "Public Authority for Radio and Television." The state newswire, Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), would join the ministry's foreign media department, which oversees non-Kuwaiti media operating in Kuwait, in becoming the new "Authority of Media and Information." And the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters will become a third authority, responsible for culture. (Note: Several semi-autonomous "authorities" exist in Kuwait in various sectors, such as the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources and the Public Authority for Youth and Sports. Such authorities are typically headed by a government-appointed director general, and are responsible to a relevant ministry, but enjoy more day-to-day autonomy than departments within ministries might, because of the specialized nature of their functions and duties. End note.) All of the new authorities would remain under the aegis of the Minister of Information.

Intellectual Property Action

3. Notable among the proposed move of departments now under Information to other ministries is the decision to transfer the Ministry of Information's Intellectual Property Rights Department to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. (Note: Since 2004, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has shown a willingness to take a larger role in intellectual property rights enforcement as part of Kuwait's progress towards a Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. End note.)

4. Al-Reshaid's plan also proposes transferring the Ministry of Information's tourism sector to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The state printing shop, currently under the purview of the Kuwait Investment Authority, will be privatized. The Minister will continue to exercise direct control over the licensing and regulation of local publications, including daily newspapers, weekly magazines, and other periodicals.

"One of the Most Significant and Advanced Projects"

5. Columnists across the ideological spectrum were quick to hail the plan. Salafi Islamist Dr. Wael Al-Hasawi, writing in Al-Rai Al-Aam on August 16, wrote, "[The Minister] has earned our admiration and gratefulness. The moment he took office he promised to bring change, and today he has fulfilled his promise. Khudair Al-Enezi, writing in Al-Qabas on August 16, wrote that the proposal "can be deemed one of the most significant and advanced projects which has been adopted by the government of His Highness Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed." Faisal Al-Zamel wrote in Al-Anba on August 16, "When people see and feel the impact of the change, then the doubts will turn into commendations and applause." One liberal, Kuwait University Professor Dr. Shamlan Al-Issa, sounded a dissenting note, asking in Al-Seyassah on August 16, "What is the reason for this restructuring if the government is going to be in charge again but in a different form?"

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